

Pollution bill revises standards, raises funding

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Environmental Control

The Senate is expected to act next week on a water pollution control bill that includes a major increase in money for sewage treatment plant construction grants and a distinct shift in the philosophy of standard setting.

The bill, approved last week by the Senate Public Works Committee, calls for a national system of permits similar to current Refuse Act permits but including municipal as well as industrial dischargers. Each permit must include specific effluent limitations for the discharger. The traditional concept of water quality standards as a measure of pollution control is largely abandoned in favor of setting effluent standards case-by-case under general guidelines.

Critics of the 1965 Water Quality Act have long argued that the water quality measurement concept was difficult if not unworkable and that some form of direct effluent limitation was the only realistic alternative.

The bill also calls for \$14 billion in federal funding for sewage treatment plant construction grants over the next four fiscal years. Included would be the already appropriated \$2 billion for fiscal 1972; \$3 billion in fiscal year 1973; \$4 billion in fiscal year 1974 and \$5 billion in fiscal year 1975. The bill, originally reported by Sen. Edmund S. Muskie's (D-Me.) subcommittee on air and water pollution, contained one more year's authorization of \$6 billion, for a grand total of \$20 billion.

This last sum reportedly was dropped by the full Public Works Committee to tempt Republican members to go along with other provisions. The Nixon administration, which had proposed only a \$6-billion, three-year commitment, is pressing strongly against the full five-year financial commitment.

Federal share upped. The bill also increases the federal share of construction costs from a base of 30% to a base of 60%. The previous maximum of 55% becomes 70% in any state that contributes 10% of the cost. Thus a locality in a participating state would bear only 20% of the project cost. Planning for and adoption of regional waste treatment is required wherever possible.

The standards portion of the bill calls for a goal of zero discharge of pollutants by 1985. Two interim standards are set. By 1976, all dischargers must

have installed the "best available technology." Economic arguments are not a factor here.

The permit system in the bill, which does not rely on the Refuse Act but creates a totally new system under the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), maintains a role for the states. States that demonstrate to EPA that they have an approved permit system would be allowed to keep it.

The bill also requires states and localities to prepare by July 1, 1973,

plans for areawide waste treatment management in areas with critical water pollution control problems.

The picture for House action on companion legislation is confused at the moment. Indications still are that some similar permit approach will be followed. But there still are problems in the House Public Works Committee with the zero-discharge concept, and other differences may emerge. The desire of the House leadership to adjourn by Dec. 1 could cause problems in getting a House bill passed and differences resolved in conference this year.

Bids spread about 17% on bridge-tunnel twin

The lowest of three bidders at \$47.6 million on the major contract for the second Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel is a joint venture of Tidewater Construction Corp., Norfolk; Peter Kiewit Sons' Co., Omaha; and Raymond International, Inc., New York City (ENR 4/16 p. 14). The job includes fabricating and placing 21 sections forming a two-lane tunnel 6,987 ft long, plus enlarging one transition island.

At the opening last week, second low at \$50.6 million was a combine of Brown & Root, Inc., Houston; Morrison-Knudsen Co., Inc., Boise; and Perini Corp., Framingham, Mass. Third, at \$55.9 million, was Guy F. Atkinson Co., South San Francisco; with The Arundel Corp., Baltimore; and L. E. Dixon Co., San Marino, Calif.

The Virginia highway department will decide in about a month whether to accept the apparent low bid, says deputy commissioner John Harwood. He refuses to disclose the estimate, but it was reportedly about \$50 million.

The entire 3.5-mile project, designed by Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade & Douglas, New York City, will cost about \$100 million. Tidewater took the first contract in July, 1970, for \$5.5 million to enlarge one island where the approach trestle dives into the tunnel. The department will call for bids on nearly 2 miles of approaches next spring, and on ventilation buildings and electrical work in 1973. The second tunnel is slated to open late in 1975.

The project has been added to the Interstate system and designated I-64. When the second bridge-tunnel is completed, the state expects that bonds secured by tolls on the first one will be paid off and the crossing will be free.

The original project, also designed by Parsons, Brinckerhoff, started in 1954 and opened three years later at a cost of \$60 million. Merritt-Chapman & Scott Corp., New York City, held the major contract with Tidewater and Raymond as subcontractors. The new tunnel and approaches have wider roadways.



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Sunken tubes drop 70 ft below surface